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ABSTRACT

This guide provides a framework for planning the triennial evaluation of students in the state of New York who receive special education services to determine whether there is a continuing need for those services. Following an introductory section which explains the rationale and basic requirements for such an evaluation, recommendations are made for determining its scope and content. The evaluation is recommended to include information regarding academic functioning, learning characteristics, and any needed alternative testing techniques; language proficiency; progress and current functioning from each professional providing related services; vocational performance and training needs; requirements for statewide testing and diploma completion; and information from other teachers, parents, and the student. Requirements for a medical and psychological evaluation are stated. Suggested determinations to be made from results of the evaluation include: the student's current level of functioning and need for special education or other education support services; the least restrictive educational environment; competency test and diploma requirements; any need for adult services; any needed material adaptations, environmental modifications, or specialized equipment; and appropriate annual Individualized Educational Plan goals. (BRM)

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# THE TRIENNIAL EVALUATION OF STUDENTS WITH HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS

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The State Education Department
Office of Special Education Services and Child Development
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Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions
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# FOREWORD

Section 200.4(f)(4) of the Regulations of the Commissioner requires that "A Committee on Special Education (CSE) shall arrange for an appropriate reexamination of each pupil with a handicapping condition at least every three years by a physician, a school psychologist, and, to the extent required by the Committee on Special Education, by other qualified appropriate professionals." Additionally, Section 200.5(a) requires that parents be sent written notice of the reevaluation. The notice should clearly describe the purpose of the reevaluation, the uses to be made of the information and the intent of the reevaluation is for the triennial evaluation.

These guidelines are intended to provide a conceptual framework within which to plan a triennial evaluation for students with handicapping conditions without restricting the flexibility and use of professional judgment which characterize such evaluations. While a reexamination of each student by a physician, school psychologist and other qualified, appropriate professionals is required, it is not intended that there be a standardized triennial assessment battery. Adequate triennial evaluations will vary in both complexity and the time needed for completion depending upon the individual needs of each student.

This publication is the result of the collaborative efforts of several professionals from public schools and university settings. Claire Barabash, Judith Mearig, Yancy Padget, Anne Pess, Vivian Sarasohn, Gil Trachtman, Terry Tyler, Melvin Schwager and their representative school districts provided valuable input in the development of the original publication. The staff of the Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions and the Office of Parent Education, Student and Child Development and Community School Programs edited the original publication and revised this edition to reflect changes in policy and regulation.

# INTRODUCTION

A child in a special education program should be expected to grow cognitively, socially, and physically. Because of this, many children may not need special education for the duration of their school years. After three years of special education, time must be allocated to thoroughly assess the pupil's individual needs and the continued appropriateness of the special education program which has been provided for the child and to determine whether he or she can move to a less restrictive environment.

The triennial evaluation shall be sufficient to determine the pupil's individual needs and continuing eligibility for special education. The triennial evaluation should be completed every three years as long as the pupil is identified as having a handicapping condition. This type of evaluation may be conducted more frequently if conditions warrant or if the child's parent or teacher requests such. However, no more than three years must pass between evaluations.

The evaluation shall be multidisciplinary, with the student's teachers, parents, and evaluating team playing an active part. The different perspectives of these individuals help provide a multifaceted, nondiscriminatory profile of the student needed to develop meaningful recommendations. However, care should be taken to ensure that the evaluation team sees the student as a whole and unique individual, with at least one member of the evaluating team being sufficiently familiar with the student to interpret the information gathered for Committee on Speical Education(CSE) members.

Formal standardized tests play a useful role in the evaluation process. However, the technical information accompanying individual and group tests has an impact on the significance of numerical scores, and must be understood. Further, the selection of tests must be individualized for each child. There is no predetermined battery of tests appropriate for all children. Whether using formal tests or other assessment procedures, the purpose of all evaluations (intellectual, educational, social/emotional, and physical) is to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of the child, so that appropriate teaching methodologies and other needed interventions can be determined.

# ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING THE TRIENNIAL EVALUATION

The triennial evaluation is based on information from the initial individual evaluation, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals for the past three years, the annual reviews, the student's current educational, social-emotional, physical, and management needs as determined by standardized and nonstandardized assessment methods, observation of the student, progress reports, the results of past parent conferences, and a review of teaching methods and materials. Historical information is used to assess what new data will be needed to determine the individual student's current needs and continuing eligibility for special education. The current assessment will include data from the student, parent, teacher, members of the evaluation team, and other staff gathered in an interactive and collaborative manner.

Sections A and B of this publication indicate questions to be considered in determining the scope and content of the triennial evaluation. These questions focus on previous program considerations and educational progress during the last three years.

Section C indicates the parental and professional information that should be included in the triennial examination. The training, experience, and judgment of professionals and the unique characteristics of a student determine the exact nature of the individual physical, psychological and educational reexaminations.

Section D reflects the questions which must be answered in order to determine a student's special education needs. The results should be a quality triennial evaluation which permits the Committee on Special Education to recommend strategies and education programs and services that truly meet the student's educational needs.

**A. Review of the factors which determined a student's present program/placement in special education.**

1. What diagnostic evidence led to the determination of the specific handicapping condition?
2. What were the student's developmental levels and needs in the following three areas?
   - Educational achievement and learning characteristics
   - Social-emotional development
   - Physical development
3. What were thought to be the student's individual learning characteristics? Are these learning characteristics consistent across all areas of instruction?
4. What was the student's level of English language proficiency and to what extent has the pupil received native language instruction or English as a second language (ESL) instruction?
5. What methods, materials, and teaching strategies were proposed?
6. What were the student's management needs? What was proposed to meet the student's management needs?
7. Was diploma status determined? Was the student exempted from second language requirements? Was a vocational assessment initiated? What recommendations were made?

Answers to questions concerning present program/placement provide an information base against which to determine the change and growth that has taken place during the student's last three years in special education.

**B. Factors emerging from an analysis of the student's progress during the past three years in special education.**

Annual reviews can provide data necessary to address many issues. Additional information can be obtained from Individualized Education Programs, report cards, teacher's planning data, anecdotal records and observation of the student.

1. What has been the student's progress in the following four areas?
   - Educational achievement and learning characteristics
   - Social-emotional development
   - Physical development
   - Management needs
2. What were the IEP goals and to what extent were they achieved?
3. What accommodations were provided in meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of the student who had been identified as having limited English proficiency, and what were the results of these accommodations?
4. What methods, materials, and teaching strategies

were used during the last three years to accommodate a student's individual learning characteristics and to what degree did each result in positive change?

5. What was provided to meet the student's management needs and has the need for intervention changed?
6. Has the junior high school or high school student been able to satisfy diploma requirements? What courses have been successfully completed? What accommodation or support was necessary for the student to successfully complete these requirements?
7. Has the student participated in the statewide testing program? What were the results?
8. Has the student used appropriate alternative testing techniques in all testing situations, including classroom exams? Were they effective?
9. Has vocational assessment and/or programming occurred? What are the results?
10. What concerns have been raised by parents and teachers regarding the student's educational program over the past three years?

Answers to this set of questions indicate the effect the special education program has had on the student's educational progress in the last three years.

**C. Conducting the current assessment.**

With knowledge of the individual student's educational history and of the questions now needing answers, a current assessment is conducted so that program recommendations can be formulated.

1. The student's current special education teacher(s) should provide information regarding the student's progress in meeting the IEP goals. The information should include results of any group and individual norm-and/or criterion-referenced achievement tests that have been administered and should answer the following questions:
   - How is the student now functioning academically in relation to his or her current IEP goals and to his or her peers?
   - What teaching methodologies best match the individual student's learning characteristics?
   - Are alternative testing techniques needed to permit the student to demonstrate the knowledge and skills attained? (See the State Education Department publication *Alternative Testing Techniques for Students with Handicapping Conditions* for specific guidance for the use of such modifications.)
2. If a student has previously been identified as having limited English proficiency, an update on the pupil's present levels of educational performance should include performance in both languages. (Refer to State Education Department publication, *Guidelines and Services to Students with Limited English Proficiency and Special Education Needs in New York State.*)
3. Each professional providing related services as specified in the student's IEP will evaluate the student's progress and current status and submit a report. Each evaluation and report will address the critical questions relevant to the particular related service being provided.
4. When the student's needs indicates that vocational education is an appropriate concern, this issue is addressed initially by conducting a vocational assessment. The information collected should provide a complete description of the student's current level of performance and training needs in this area. (See the State Education Department publication, *The Vocational Assessment of Students with Handicapping Conditions.*)
5. For elementary and junior high school students, participation in all content area courses which are prerequisite to the statewide testing program and high school diploma should be considered.
6. For junior high school or high school students fulfilling diploma credit-bearing course requirements, an assessment should be made of the courses needed in order to complete diploma requirements. The results of the annual guidance review should be considered.
7. Other persons who are significant to the student's educational program should provide information needed by the CSE to assist in answering critical questions (e.g., information from a tutor, mainstream subject area teacher, or bilingual education staff who currently provides instruction to the student).
8. The perspective of parents or person(s) acting in parental relation regarding the student should be expressed directly to the CSE whenever possible. This information should address the parents' view of the student within the family, the parents' evaluation of the student's adaptive behavior

within the community, and the parents' current educational concerns.

9. The perspective of the student should also be considered by the CSE whenever appropriate. This is especially pertinent at the secondary level when it may be important for the student to express his/her educational concerns and life goals as well as participate in the decisions regarding his/her program development.

10. The report of the physical reexamination will address all critical questions that relate to the student's medical and/or physical needs. The physician's examination includes an evaluation of the general health of the student and indicates any health problems and/or conditions that may impede the student's progress in an education program. The physician's description of the student is generated against a background which includes the unique physical history of the student and age-appropriate child development parameters. The report may include recommendations for modification of the student's educational program.

11. The school psychologist will conduct a psychological reexamination of the student. The areas that the psychologist needs to evaluate will be determined by the student's individual needs. The report of this reexamination will seek to answer the critical questions previously formulated and to describe changes in a pupil's developmental, learning, behavioral, and personality characteristics that will affect the future educational program.

    In addressing the question of continuing eligibility for special education services, the assessment of cognitive development continues to be of significance. In the case of a triennial evaluation, there should always be previous relevant findings. When a student with previously documented average to above average intellectual functioning is being reevaluated, the school psychologist should make a professional judgment as to whether or not a formal test of intelligence will be administered and document the reason for that decision in the written report. For students whose previous evaluations found a below average level of intellectual functioning, an individual measure of current intellectual functioning is an important aspect of determining continuing eligibility and handicapping condition and is expected to be conducted.

    In special cases, such as students with autism or profound or multiple handicapping conditions, the school psychologist may determine that an alternative form of cognitive assessment is more appropriate and should be used. This determination is made on an individual basis and should be noted in the report.

    In all cases, the school psychologist must consider and interpret the impact of the student's handicapping condition, the level of English proficiency, and the effects of the intervening educational program on the results of the evaluation in order to avoid an underestimation of the level of intellectual functioning.

**D. Results of the triennial evaluation.**

The results of a student's triennial evaluation will answer the following critical questions:

1. What are the student's current levels of academic or educational achievement and learning characteristics, social development, physical development and management needs? How do these needs relate to class placement and the concept of grouping by similarity of needs?

2. Based on the student's current performance, are special education services still necessary or can the needs of this child now be met in a regular education program with declassification support services, alternative testing techniques, and available general education support options, such as educationally related support services, speech and language improvement services and services to students who have limited English proficiency. Is bilingual special education instruction required for the student? If the student is declassified and has been exempted from a second language, should the exemption be continued?

3. What is the student's current status with regard to meeting competency test requirements and accruing diploma credits?

4. If the child has reached age 15, has the CSE considered the student's need for adult services as described in the State Education Department publication, *The Transition from School to Adult Services: An Interagency Approach to Planning?*

5. Has the least restrictive environment been considered for a child who continues to be eligible for special education? If not, why not? What special or regular education program and/or services are recommended if the child is to receive special education? Are alternative testing techniques

needed? Can a determination be made as to whether a student's program is leading to a Regents, local, or high school IEP diploma, or to a local certificate? What evidence was used to make a determination regarding diploma status? Is a vocational program indicated? If so, what is the nature and extent of the vocational program?

6. If continued eligibility is to be recommended, what adaptations of instructional methods and materials are necessary? What educational strategies should be continued? What environmental modifications or specialized and adapted equipment are indicated? What annual IEP goals are indicated?

With an in-depth evaluation by persons knowledgeable about and familiar with the individual student, the CSE can make an informed decision about the pupil's future educational program and make recommendations regarding programs and services to meet the pupil's individual needs.

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